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Bryan and the Presidency

"Cross of Gold and Crown of Thorns"—How a Wonderful Speech Won a Presidential Nomination.



Mrs. William J. Bryan.

His Renomination in 1900. The Dominant Spirit of the Democracy For Twelve Years. Bryan In 1908

By ROBERTUS LOVE.
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WHEN the Democratic national convention met at Chicago in 1896 one of the delegates from Nebraska was William Jennings Bryan, a young man of thirty-six, a private citizen of the city of Lincoln. His prior political career comprised two terms in congress. He had been his party nominee for a United States senatorship in a Republican legislature.

The national Democracy had broken away from Grover Cleveland, whom it had elected president twice and who was then in office. The split was of the money question. Cleveland had called a special session of congress to repeal the silver bullion purchasing act. The mass of the party stood for the free coinage of silver, chiefly at the ratio of 16 to 1. The Cleveland wing stood for the single gold standard.



WILLIAM J. BRYAN IN 1896.

"You shall not press down upon the row of labor this crown of thorns. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."

The mighty chasm widened at the convention. Congressman Richard P. Bland of Missouri, "Silver Dick," the old war horse of the free silver coinage movement, was the logical and apparently the inevitable candidate for the presidency. His nomination seemed to be a certainty until a thing happened hitherto unprecedented in American politics.

Bryan of Nebraska, known as "the silver-tongued orator" and "the boy orator of the Platte," mounted the platform and delivered a brief but bold and masterful speech. His vibrant voice rang out over the heads of the 5,000 persons in the vast hall, penetrating with clarion intonation to the farthest corners. The customary up-roar of a great political convention, which the strongest of oratorical lungs, as a rule, cannot quell entirely, was rushed into unbreathing awe. No such eloquence ever before had been heard in a national convention. The man and the occasion had met, and the man had mastered the occasion. The address was an impassioned appeal for metallism and an exalted glorification of the new Democratic financial doctrine. When the orator closed with his epoch making metaphor of "the cross of gold and crown of thorns" the enthusiastic approbation of his sentiments and of the man himself was indicated by a whirlwind of applause which subsided.

And William Jennings Bryan was nominated for the presidency of the United States.

Flashed to the remotest reaches of the nation, the news was the most sensational political tidbit that ever took the wires. Bryan was but one year above the minimum age required by the constitution of the United States for a president. While some of his speeches in congress a few years before had given him a momentary reputation, he was practically unknown to the nation at large, and particularly so to the great eastern section of the country. Never before had a great party nominated for president a man living west of the Mississippi river. Never before had so young a man been nominated. Never before had an orator won the great prize by a single speech. Democrats, Republicans, Populists, everybody wondered how the newcomer would conduct himself in the campaign.

Presently the wonder turned to amazement. Young Mr. Bryan was a campaigner—there was no doubt as to that. He injected into American politics a presidential campaign such as the nation never knew before. Men called it a whirlwind campaign, and such it was. The whirlwind road was the railroad, and it carried the candidate up and down all across the land upon an amazing schedule of traveling and talking. Mr. Bryan traveled in that campaign more than 18,000 miles and delivered considerably more than 2,000 speeches. He made forty-nine speeches in one day in New York state. Thirty-five addresses, short and

long, were delivered by him on several days, while it was an ordinary thing for him to address twenty crowds at twenty different towns in twenty hours. The candidate showed a physique and a voice that stood the tremendous strain with marvelous endurance. As the campaign progressed and the fame of Bryan spread people got to sitting up all night and traveling many miles just to hear the phenomenon speak.

Bryan's first appearance in the east was on the 12th of August, when he delivered his speech of acceptance of the nomination. Madison Square Garden was packed with a suffocating mass of men and women, though it was one of the hottest days ever known in New York and a dozen persons had died from sunstroke during the day. Bryan read that speech from manuscript, a disappointing thing, for it detracted greatly from his eloquence. But the candidate was well aware that great issues hinged upon his utterances on that important occasion, and he did not care to trust himself to the uncurbed enthusiasm of the moment.

With Arthur Sewall of Maine, the vice-presidential candidate, Bryan went down to defeat at the November election, though he had been nominated also by the Populist party, with Thomas E. Watson of Georgia as the vice-presidential candidate on that ticket. McKinley and Hobart went into office, and there were those who predicted that Bryan was forever eliminated from the Democracy.

Four years later at the Democratic national convention in Kansas City Mr. Bryan was renominated by acclamation. There was absolutely no other candidate suggested for the nomination. For vice-president Adlai E. Stevenson of Bloomington, Ill., who had been vice-president during Cleveland's second term, was named. The war with Spain and our consequent acquisition of the Philippine Islands had brought new issues into politics, but the silver plank was reemphasized in the Democratic platform. Mr. Bryan, declining to stand for the nomination without it, was expressly declared

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NEW PICTURE OF MR.

In the platform, however, that imperialism was the paramount issue of the campaign. The Democracy opposed the forcible subjugation of the Philippines and the control of the archipelago in the colonial style of the British empire.

Mr. Bryan made another whirlwind campaign, even breaking his own record for traveling and speechmaking



WILLIAM J. BRYAN, JR.

He was forty years of age and in the full flush of magnificent manhood. During the four years since 1896 he had done much political speaking and writing; he had lectured many times on other topics, he had traveled abroad and studied other governments and conditions of people; also he had become Colonel Bryan, having gone to camp during the Spanish war as colonel of a Nebraska regiment

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and the great east lashed and
slashed the western candidate with
outrage denunciation, though that
there was a very large increase
personal respect for Mr. Bryan. He
viewed himself to be by no means
wild visionary, the altar of a revo-
lutionist, the dangerous fanatic, which
opposition in his own party has
assured him as being in 1896, when
the Democracy split open and the less
section thereof nominated a "gold
mercantile" ticket, with General John
Palmer of Illinois and General St.
B. Buckner of Kentucky as the
standard bearers, thus contributing to
Bryan's defeat in the first campaign
of the campaign of 1900 the Demo-
cratic seceders simply voted the Mc-
Clellan and Roosevelt Republican tick-



MR. BRYAN IN THE 1900 CAMPAIGN.

A second time Bryan went down
defeat, but gracefully and with
d cheer.

He was at his home in Lincoln on
that day, ate an early dinner, went
stairs at about 6 o'clock and sleep-
ed until 11, when he came down
discovered that he was badly
tired. He snuggled to the assembled
orders, returned to his bed and sleep-
ed until morning. It was said
those present that he evinced not
slightest sign of disappointment.

Mr. Bryan did not seek the nomina-
tion in 1904. He was quite willing for
disaffected wing of the Democracy
name the ticket just to see if that
ment could do better than the other
attended the convention in St.
Pauls as a delegate, made an amazing
tour for a platform upon which he and
supporters could stand and won the
t by sheer force of brain and
will. He arose from his bed on the
ly morning of the last day of the
vention, though threatened with
pneumonia, and just as the dawn was
aking over the city he delivered



AND MRS. BRYAN.

that convention to the vast throng
which had waited and sweated and
sted all night long just to hear him
speech which for pathos and power
d thrill no inveterate convention fol-
lwer ever heard equaled. The Demo-
cratic ticket, Judge Alton E. Parker
New York and ex-Senator Henry G.
avis of West Virginia, was defeated
November inexpressibly worse than
Bryan in either of his campaigns.

The discovery of vast deposits of
oil in Alaska and elsewhere since the
silver campaigns has eliminated
the money issue from politics. Mr.
Bryan has accepted this fact and now
ends upon other Democratic issues.
Despite all opposition, he has domi-
nated the national Democracy for
eleven years. For several years past
he has given expression to his views
in the weekly journal, the Commoner,
which he established at Lincoln. He
removed to a fine farm near Lin-
coln, built a commodious residence and
come known throughout the world
as the "great American commoner,"
regular successor to Henry Clay. He
s traveled around the world and
written his impressions for a syndicate
American newspapers. He has been
years the most popular and highest
d lecturer on the American lyceum
d Chautauqua circuits. It is said
that his income from lecturing alone
as much as \$50,000 a year, the presi-
dents salary.

Mr. Bryan is a total abstainer from
mohol and tobacco. He is a member
the Presbyterian church and never
orks on Sunday, save to deliver a re-
ligious address now and then. His
al is morality, personal, political
d civic. The Bryan of 1908 looks
er than the Bryan of 1896, but he is
less vigorous and virile than he was
ne his voice flashed across the con-
ent from the Chicago convention hall.

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